

Veterans Project Interview To Library of Congress

SPOHP Internal CAT NO: AAHP 382 Daniel Keel 7-15-2015

Checklist:

Biographical Data Form
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DVD/CD of interview
Audio Log

Submitting Institution: Samuel Proctor Oral History Program
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Additionally, please fill out this information

1. Name/Address of interviewer: Bruce Hansen
2. Interviewee Birthday: 9-10-1922
3. Recording Format: 16bit 48 khz WAV, Data file(s) submitted on an optical disc
And also a video recording in mp4 format
4. Duration of Recording: 57 min
5. Place of Interview: The Villages, Florida

Audio Recording Log

Minute Mark Hour:Min:Sec 00:00:00	Topic/Theme/paraphrase of conversation
00:00:33	Born in NY on September 10 th , 1922.
00:00:41	Parents moved to Massachusetts when he was a year old. When Daniel turned four, his parents separated. At 5, Daniel and his brother were sent to a boarding school in Lexington, MA.
00:01:06	After finishing the first grade, Daniel's aunt (from North Carolina) comes for a visit. During her visit, she realizes that Daniel's brother isn't feeling too well. She discusses with Michael's father (her brother) the possibility of taking him down South to nurse him back to health.
00:01:40	Younger brother's name was Stanley Keel.
00:01:48	Father agrees to Stanley going down South. Father also thought it'd be a good idea for Daniel to accompany his brother for that year.
00:02:00	Went down South (South Carolina) for the year. Their one year stay, however, turns into a five year stay.
00:02:07	Schools in the South for "Negroes" were called six and six (six months long; went as far as the 6 th grade). The nearest school to his uncle's house was roughly four miles away. The only way he could get to

	school was by walking (four miles there, four miles back). Daniel was six years old at this point. Fortunately, his older cousins would carry him to school when he got too tired.
00:02:51	At the end of sixth grade, his aunt from Brooklyn, NY comes to visit them in South Carolina. Aunt Lucy tells her that Daniel has gone as far as he could in school; the only way that he can further his education is by having him move to Charleston, SC. This would require them to find a family willing to take Daniel on as a house boy. His aunt from Brooklyn didn't like this idea. When she gets to Brooklyn, she pays a visit to Daniel's father in Massachusetts. A couple of months after that, Daniel and his brother move back to Massachusetts, where he finishes his education.
00:03:37	Daniel finished his education in 1937. He was then sent to high school. At the time, his high school was the toughest high school (academically) in the United States. 50 was a passing grade. The freshman class, for instance, was comprised of 600 students. The graduating class, however, was roughly made up of 300 students.
00:04:10	Daniel says that the only reason he went to Latin School was because his music teacher told him that he was the only one out of the four students that had applied, that she believed wouldn't make it. This angered Daniel deeply.
00:04:20	Daniel sometimes regrets his decision. Although school hours ran from 9:00 a.m. to 2:30 p.m., he had four hours of homework every night. The excessive homework took a toll on him. However, out of the four that applied and attended, he was the only one that finished. The first thing he did when he graduated was to visit his music teacher to cheekily tell her of his accomplishment.
00:04:49	From there, Daniel attended Northeastern University, where he studied aeronautical engineering. While at Northeastern University, the war started.
00:05:03	While in school, Daniel working at the First National Store as an errand boy (he delivered groceries and newspapers).
00:05:21	Daniel attended welding school for six weeks. At night time, he worked at the Penman shipyard as a welder. His education and his knowledge of welding had him placed in 1A. This meant that he was drafted.
00:06:08	After completing the physical for drafting purposes, the man looked at him and saw that he was a Negro. The first thing the man uttered was "Navy."
00:06:16	Daniel recalls visiting the movie theater before he was drafted. After cartoons were played, the daily news aired for the audience. Through that, Daniel was aware of the "projects" that our military was involved in. He knew that the Navy would not be ideal for him, as he suffered from sea sickness. Made up his mind that if he was ever drafted, he'd prefer joining the Air Force.
00:07:13	Went to the National Guard Headquarters and decided to go in to see what qualifications one needed to enter the Air Force. At the time, a two-year college education was required, along with the passing of an exam administered by their organization.

00:07:31	As he was walking out the door, the gentleman that attended Daniel asked him if he'd like to take the qualification exam. Daniel asked if he'd be immediately drafted if he took the test. The gentleman assured him that he would not be drafted. He said if he passed, he could volunteer and go off to the Air Force. If he didn't want to volunteer and was drafted later, he could easily go into the Air Force.
00:07:51	Daniel took the test and later got a letter saying he had passed it (this was in May). By August of that same year, Daniel had been drafted. Although the gentleman at the drafting headquarters wanted to place him in the Navy because Daniel was a "Negro," Daniel was able to reject his offer by pulling the letter signed by a general. The letter read that if he was drafted, he had the right to go into the Air Force. This is how Daniel ultimately got into the Air Force.
00:08:37	Daniel's father was a chauffeur. His uncle, however, owned 150 acres of land in the South. Daniel learned how to hoe cotton, plow cotton--anything a farmer could do, Daniel could do.
00:09:02	Recalls a particular gruesome and psychologically scarring experience he had in South Carolina. One day, a black man comes running over to their home asking for Daniel's uncle's help. He is being chased by a mob of men. Daniel's uncle tells him that if he chooses to hide him, he will surely have his house burned down because of it. His uncle gives the gentleman as much food as he could carry and the man left. Two days later, they find him dead. He was lynched. Daniel never forgot this.
00:10:20	As a child in South Carolina, he recalls having to step off sidewalks to allow white people to walk. After a while, Daniel adapted and got used to it (it was a means of survival). Because others did it and didn't question it, Daniel went along with it.
00:11:40	When he went up to Boston, he attended integrated schools. Once school was out, however, the white students would go one way and the black students the other. The white and black students bonded during school hours, but never associated themselves with one another in outside public and/or private spaces.
00:12:15	Recalls that high school was particularly difficult for him. Because he was attending an elite school, most of the students' parents could afford to hire academic tutors. Daniel's family didn't have the economic means to do the same for him. Although they lived comfortably (they always had a place to live in, food on the table, and clothes to wear), they did not have money for extra expenditures.
00:13:00	Once drafted, Daniel was sent to Keesler Field, Mississippi for two months of basic training. When he was boarding the train to Mississippi, was told not to get out of his Pullman car because he would not be able to get back on due to racism. Did not get off until he reached Mississippi. When he arrived, he realized he was the only black person to arrive in Mississippi via a Pullman car.
00:14:55	When he reached Mississippi, Michael was surprised to see that there were 300 other men that wanted to be pilots. There were sergeants, privates, and lieutenants, and all of them were part of the Tuskegee experiment.

00:15:07	At the end of basic training, they had to take a two-part test before they could go to Tuskegee. The first part of the test was called a psychological (multiple choice) test that ran for eight hours. The second part of the test was called a “psychosomatic test” that lasted for four hours. Of the 300 that participated in basic training, only 10% were selected to go to Tuskegee.
00:15:48	The Tuskegee airmen proved to the world that if the Negro was given the opportunity, with a good education, hard work, and a little luck, they could do the job as well as anyone else.
00:16:00	When Truman ordered for Negroes to become pilots, that’s when Mrs. Roosevelt came into action. Daniel (and his comrades) believed that if Eleanor Roosevelt had not been a staunch supporter of their cause, the Tuskegee airmen “may never have gotten off the ground.”
00:16:39	Because of her support and belief in their capabilities, Daniel and the other airmen felt it was their duty to never let Mrs. Roosevelt down.
00:17:03	When President Roosevelt finally ordered the army to start training “Negroes” to become pilots, over 15,000 blacks took and passed the qualifying exam. Out of the 15,000 that took and passed the exam, they only recruited 10%. Of that 10%, they took 80% of the 10%.
00:17:34	When President Roosevelt ordered the army to send “Negroes” into combat, Daniel and his comrades believed that Ms. Roosevelt had a “hand in it.” When he ordered African Americans to go into combat, their mission was to help defend Liberia (an African country). When the black pilots were sent over, the “enemy” was retreating, so there was no need for the black pilots to defend Liberia.
00:18:06	Black pilots were then placed on patrol duty “way behind the enemy lines.” When Black pilots asked for more direct military action, their racist commanding officer told his superiors that although the black pilots were “good,” he didn’t think they’d perform well in combat. He also argued that black army men would fall apart in battle. As far as the commanding officer was concerned, he recommended that the black pilots be disbanded and sent back to the U.S. He supported his argument by claiming that in all the time they (the black pilots) had been there, they had not shot down a single enemy airplane.
00:18:57	Momyer, the racist commanding officer, was also in charge of all bombing missions. In each bombing mission, bombers came back with serious losses. The State Department, and the Defense Department were upset by the bombers’ heavy losses.
00:19:20	Momyer ordered the Tuskegee airmen to start escorting the bombers, colonel Davis had a pretty good idea as to what Momyer had planned. Davis understood why the bombers were incurring such heavy losses.
00:19:39	Daniel argues that each and every single fighter pilot wanted to be an “ace.” An “ace” was a pilot that shot down 5 or more enemy airplanes. When the bombers were being escorted by the fighter pilots, the fighter pilots drove away the enemy planes to protect the bombers. When the enemy planes start leaving the bombers, the fighter pilots start chasing them. When they went off chasing the enemy airplanes, they left the bombers unprotected. When other enemy planes came in the area and

	<p>saw that the bombers were unprotected, they'd swoop in and attack. Colonel Davis figured this was what was taking place. Told his men to never leave bombers unattended. If they did, they'd be punished.</p>
00:21:03	<p>Once they finished basic training, men were sent to the Tuskegee army airbase for three months of academic training. That academic training was a "joke" (according to Daniel) because they covered topics that were seen in high school. This was shortened to six weeks and they were then sent to pre-flight training, which ran for two months.</p>
00:21:40	<p>Pre-flight training introduced the men to the basics of airplanes. This was all purely academic training.</p>
00:21:57	<p>At the end of the two month pre-flight training, they were told they were forming a former bomber group. The bomber group needed navigators. None of the men wanted to be navigators; they wanted to be pilots.</p>
00:22:14	<p>Six months after Daniel got his navigator wings, Daniel and his comrades were told that the planes that the black pilots were flying had twin engines. The twin engines required that the navigator be a bombardier because of space issues. They were then to train to be bombardiers.</p>
00:22:40	<p>Right after they got off training, they were introduced to Lieutenant Colonel Phelps. Introduced himself as the deputy commander of the Midland Army Airbase. Told the men that he was born in Texas, raised in Texas, and that he expected to die in Texas. Blatantly told Daniel and his comrades that if they as "Negroes" didn't know their place in his state of Texas, that he'd have no issue in spelling it out for them.</p>
00:23:11	<p>Rules they were expected to follow as black officers: (1) They could not eat in the officers' nest (cafeteria); (2) they could not go into the officers' club (social area); (3) if they were to go to the theatre, they could not sit in the officers' section; and (4) if they'd go to town, they'd have to ride in the back of the bus.</p>
00:23:46	<p>Meals back in Daniel's day were called breakfast, dinner and supper. Between the hours of 12-1 o'clock, no food was given to the men. However, Daniel and his comrades observed that when a group of white cadets sat down in the cafeteria, they were promptly fed. After the white officers were fed, leftovers were given to the black officers. Daniel and his black comrades were angered and vowed not to eat the leftovers. Later went to the officer's cafeteria and demanded to be fed fresh food.</p>
00:24:20	<p>The next morning after breakfast, Phelps and his men came over to their quarters and demanded to know why the black army men had disobeyed his orders. They explained the unjust situation to the Lieutenant Colonel and he retorted that their justifications were simply not enough. He had all of them court martialed.</p>
00:24:40	<p>One of Daniel's classmates who had spent a year at the Pentagon before becoming a navigator, said to Daniel and the men: "If we are going to be court martialed, let's not be court martialed by a lieutenant colonel, let's be court martialed by a general." Daniel and the other men immediately questioned the motives behind this. Friend responded that it would look better on all the men's records to be court martialed by a general rather than a lieutenant colonel.</p>

00:25:06	Daniel and the men wrote a letter for the general.
00:25:09	Took Daniel's daughter 12 years to find a copy of the letter the men had drafted for the general. Daniel has it in his possession.
00:25:24	Daniel was the last of the men to receive the letter. Read it over and asked the other men if they had read it and whether it had been approved or not. The men responded that the letter had been approved but that no one had signed it for fear that Phelps would punish whomever signed the letter first (they'd be seen as the ring leader). Daniel was then the first one to sign the letter. Most of his classmates co-signed it later that day. They then sent the copy and had it delivered on the base commander's desk.
00:26:21	A couple of days after Daniel and his comrades had sent the letter, a group of white officers came over to their quarters and informed them that the general was at the base. The general then ordered all the white officers to meet with him at the base theater to discuss the list of grievances listed by the black officers.
00:26:40	The white officers explained that after they'd finish the meeting, they'd come back with a report. About an hour later, the same white officers came by and updated them on the situation. They informed Daniel and his classmates that the discussion on their black/white officer situation had become so heated that a fist fight broke out. After the General restored order in the theater, he informed the white officers that the black officers were to be treated with the same level of respect and dignity as their white counterparts.
00:27:47	Two weeks later, Phelps again tried to have Daniel and five of his classmates' court martialled (he again failed).
00:27:59	Phelps ordered Daniel and his black classmates to go through a gas mask drill. He intentionally ordered during one of the most humid and hot days. The gas mask drill required the men to wear a full gas mask for a period of four hours. To make sure that the men "got the full benefit of it," the drill was to take place between the hours of 1-5 p.m. Because Daniel's barrack was one of the coolest, he invited the men over to his quarters. After they arrived, Daniel locked the door. About 2 hours later, Lieutenant Colonel Phelps checks up on them. They open the door and he demands to know why they're not wearing their gas masks. Says that he is going to have them court martialled. They inform him that according to army regulations, the men are only supposed to do one of these drills once every six months. Since they had already done one, they argued that this one was unnecessary.
00:30:30	The lieutenant colonel immediately goes to the administration building to check their records and realizes that what Daniel and his comrades said were true.
00:30:41	Two weeks before graduation, they were told that Phelps was doing everything in his power to have Daniel and his black classmates "sent to some Godforsaken island in the Pacific." Given the army's racist politics, they wouldn't possibly let a "black navigator tell a white pilot where to go."
00:31:07	Argues that the reason why there weren't any black pilots in combat

	during that time was because the administration's overt racism (ex. commanding officer and his boss).
00:31:17	Reason why they made it through without any casualties was because their airbase was not so much a training center, as an R&R base for returning combat bombardiers. The returning combat bombardiers were their instructors (Daniel's and his classmates). These bombardiers, protected by the (black) Red Tails when in combat, felt a camaraderie and loyalty with the black men in the base. Did not give in to Phelps racialized intimidations, threats, and bribes to have the black men in the base thrown out.
00:32:15	Army realized they don't have enough pilots to accommodate the navigators. Sent Daniel and his classmates back to pilot training.
00:32:34	When they go back to pilot training, there are 27 of them in the group. When graduation time rolls around, there are only 3 of them left. The men believe that Phelps had something to do with this.
00:32:43	More specifically, the men believe that in sending Daniel and the other 26 men back to Tuskegee, none of them were supposed to make it all the way through.
00:32:54	Recounts story that takes place during their second week back in Tuskegee. When Daniel and the rest of the group attend an A&NI course (Aircraft and Naval Identification), they come across 10 X's up on the blackboard. When their instructor walks in (a black man, and civilian), he tells Daniel and his classmates that by the end of that week, 10 of them would no longer be in the course (or the program for that matter). They agree that Phelps' disdain for them is following them all the way to Tuskegee.
00:33:34	By the end of the week, 10 men are thrown out of pilot training. Daniel topped the list. The 10 men that "happened" to be thrown out of pilot training were linked to the first 10 signatures in the letter against Phelps. Daniel being the first one to sign it was, not surprisingly, the first one thrown out of pilot training.
00:33:56	Daniel and the men proceed to write and send a letter to the commanding general.
00:34:00	A couple of days later, the commanding general visits the base. After meeting with general is over, Daniel and the other nine men are placed back in the pilot training program—the instructor is fired.
00:34:13	Recounts dwindling number of men in pilot training program throughout their time there.
00:34:38	Before entering basic fight training, Daniel and men are told two things. First, "All training done in basic and advance is done by army personnel." Daniel recalls these instructors not being very friendly. In fact, there were records of these instructors not allowing anyone to advance through training/graduation. Officers trained 3 in basic and 3 in advance—knew that six men in every class wouldn't make it to graduation. Secondly, Daniel and the men are told that the "planes everyone had trained in basic before us would no longer gonna be used." The planes that the men would have to train in were older

	planes.
00:35:28	Fortunately for Daniel and two of his classmates, a returning 99 captain is given an instructor position. Daniel and his two classmates were his first pupils.
00:35:50	Basic flight training included learning elementary handling of planes (ex.: takeoff and landing, flying straight, etc.)
00:36:10	Recalls roommate doing maneuvers in primary training (which was not allowed). At the end of primary training, the men were supposed to sign paperwork attesting to their performance of assigned tasks. Because his roommate broke this rule, Phelps had him court-martialed and fined (100 dollars per month for 12 months).
00:37:00	Basic training is when the men start doing maneuvers (ex. stalls, springs, etc.).
00:37:27	When they finished basic flight training, there were only three of them left (Daniel included) because having a black instructor gives them this opportunity.
00:37:46	Right before they head into advanced training, they were told that the “flight game” was changed once again. The planes that twin engine students had flown in were no longer going to be used for training purposes. Twin engine students in his class would have to learn how to fly the B-25 Billie Mitchell bomber planes. Single engine students would train to fly the P-40 fighter plane.
00:38:09	When Daniel and the group walk to the flight area, see plenty of B-25s but no P-40s. This meant that the single engine students were trained to fly the AT-6 planes; it also meant that the single engine students would have the same instructors in advanced that they had in basic.
00:38:31	The instructors that taught students to fly the AT-10s, did not qualify to teach students to fly the B-25s. This meant that outside instructors had to be brought in.
00:38:45	Right after they finish basic flight training, Daniel’s instructor tells his classmates (Lindsey and Williams) that they were going to be trained to be twin engine pilots. Daniel would be trained to be a fighter pilot. Daniel knew that with Phelps “on his back,” his chances of being a fighter pilot “ran anywhere between slim to none.” Daniel relayed this to the instructor; instructor informs him that he doesn’t make the assignments. Daniel pleads with him to have him transferred to twin engine training. Instructor is able to switch him over.
00:39:50	Two and a half weeks before graduation, all Daniel had to do to earn his pilot wings and earn a promotion was to pass his “cross-country interment flight check” and A&NI tests.
00:40:13	The day before Daniel has his interment flight check, Daniel develops a cold. His classmates tell him that the best way to get rid of his cold is to take a “swig” of Alabama moonshine. Daniel takes their advice and ends up in the hospital, where he is treated for seven days.
00:40:49	After he checks out of the hospital, Daniel tells instructor that he is ready for his interment flight check. Instructor tells Daniel that it’s not possible, as all flight checks for his classmates had been completed.

	Daniel would have to wait until the next class came along to take his flight check examinations.
00:41:18	Instructor gives him a chance to take the flight check examinations over the weekend. Daniel passes with flying colors.
00:41:57	Although Daniel passed the flight check with high marks, and had evidence of his strong academic record, a friend of his tells him that one of the instructors has been bribed by Phelps to fail Daniel in his A&NI tests. The promise to the instructor is that he will be made first lieutenant.
00:42:55	Although Daniel excels at the test (he and his classmates had similar notes and they scored in the 96-100 range), the instructor tells him he's "lost" Daniel's test. Daniel then has to retake it. He passes it again. Although he scores a 70, his average amongst all tests is an 89 (meaning Daniel can be promoted).
00:44:06	Daniel heads to the administration building to check on his records. Daniel's flight record says "very satisfactory." His academic record, however, is blank. He questions this and the man tells him that if he wants to receive his pilot "wings," he has to sign off the blank paper. Daniel goes ahead and signs it. He cannot be promoted.
00:45:00	Two weeks later, the instructor is given the "promised" promotion.
00:45:12	Recounts "mischievous" flying stories.
00:49:00	When he was offered a chance to make a career in the Air Force, first one to resign.
00:50:22	Did not go overseas; atomic bomb ends war.
00:51:00	Once he leaves the Air Force, pursues commercial pilot license.
00:51:10	Switches his major from aeronautical engineering to electrical engineering—he could see that there was no future in aeronautical engineering.
00:51:30	While he was pursuing his electrical engineering degree, he managed to get his initial licensing, then his master's licensing. Soon after, opened up his own electrical contracting firm. Ran it successfully until his retirement in 1998.
00:51:50	Retired in Florida, lives here permanently.
00:52:10	Business took over his business in Massachusetts. Now son retired, so he closed down the business.
00:52:25	Father youngest of 21 children.
00:52:31	Grandfather was from Malaysia. He came over as a cabin boy.
00:52:49	Mother's father was German.
00:53:10	Daniel didn't know his mother until he was eleven years old as his parents were separated.
00:53:33	Daniel has eight children: Claudia (retired chemist); Curtis (retired electrician); Barbara (Brandeis graduate/business owner); Deborah (graduate of Boston College/retired patrol officer); Kenneth (joined brother in electrical business); Lynn (successfully earned many higher education degrees; youngest works in post office). Of all his children, only three got married. Daniel has six grandchildren, the oldest one passed away. Daniel also has eight great grandchildren, and two great-

	great grandsons.
00:56:00	Advises future generations to get a good education and work hard.
	[End of interview]